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Afghan government, Taliban open talks

The Washington Post

DOHA, Qatar — After nearly 20 years of conflict, the Afghan government came face-to-face with Taliban leaders Saturday to begin what many expect will be intensely difficult negotiations to shape Afghanistan's future.

The launch of direct, formal talks between the two sides began with an opening ceremony featuring Secretary of State Mike Pompeo.

The Taliban held power over most of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, when the group, then closely aligned with al-Qaida, was ousted in the U.S. invasion of the country in the weeks after the Sept. 11 attacks on the United States. In the prolonged conflict that followed, which has killed tens of thousands of civilians and more than 2,440 U.S. troops, Taliban militants have reclaimed control or influence over roughly half of Afghanistan.

That influence extends to the negotiating table, where Taliban militants won concessions in talks with the United States that culminated in a peace deal signed in February. After showing resilience on the battlefield and stubbornness in negotiations, the militants enter the landmark talks with many of their demands met in the U.S. deal and with leverage gained from relentless attacks on Afghan forces.

That leverage could prove advantageous as the two sides seek to merge their dramatically different visions of a postwar Afghanistan.

Abdullah Abdullah, the head of the Afghan government delegation, told reporters on the flight from Kabul to Doha on Friday that the talks are “a great opportunity” despite the differences between the two sides. But he warned that it would be a miscalculation “if one side thinks they have the upper hand.”

Any resolution will demand significant compromises from one or both sides. The Taliban has long been opposed to democratic elections, and its leaders have issued only vague statements on the group's position on women's rights. Delegates from the Afghan government side support keeping the country's constitution intact and preserving advances in civil liberties.

The launch of negotiations was plagued by months of delays as the Afghan government pushed back against the conditions set for the talks by the U.S.-Taliban deal. That agreement charts a course for the full withdrawal of American troops, a central Taliban objective, but does not in exchange explicitly demand a reduction in violence — a key government request.

The deal also called for the release of thousands of Taliban prisoners ahead of direct talks, an issue so fraught that the

final six high-value Taliban prisoners were transferred from Afghan custody just two days before the talks, despite strong objections from key American allies France and Australia.

Taliban leaders celebrated the deal as a victory, breaking out into chants of “God is great” at the signing ceremony. But many Afghan officials and civilians viewed the document as a betrayal. It contained no language ensuring Afghanistan would remain a democracy, made no mention of women's rights or civil liberties, and called for the prisoner release before talks began, a move some viewed as ceding key government leverage.

Zalmay Khalilzad, the U.S. special envoy for Afghanistan, acknowledged that the Afghan government thinks the deal could have been negotiated differently to put Afghan leaders in a stronger position. One long-held desire of the Afghan government was to negotiate with the Taliban directly.

“But we tried that for God knows how many years,” Khalilzad said in an interview Friday. He defended the approach that he spearheaded to negotiate with the Taliban first and then “open the door” to peace negotiations between the government and the militants.

“There is now an opportunity to reach an end to the war,” he said.

Bahrain agrees to normalize relations with Israel

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — Bahrain on Friday agreed to normalize relations with Israel, becoming the latest Arab nation to do so as part of a broader diplomatic push by President Donald Trump and his administration to further ease the Jewish state's relative isolation in the Middle East and find common ground with nations that share U.S. wariness of Iran.

Trump announced the agreement on the 19th anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks following a phone call he had with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Bahrain's King Hamad bin Isa Al Khalifa. The three leaders also issued a brief joint statement marking the second such Arab normalization agreement with

Israel in the past two months.

The announcement came less than a week before Trump hosts a White House ceremony to mark the establishment of full relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, something that Trump and his Middle East team brokered in August. Bahrain's foreign minister will attend that event and sign a separate agreement with Netanyahu.

“There's no more powerful response to the hatred that spawned 9/11 than this agreement,” Trump told reporters at the White House.

Friday's agreement is another diplomatic win for Trump less than two months before the presidential election and an opportunity to shore up support among pro-Israel

evangelical Christians. In addition to the UAE deal, Trump just last week announced agreements in principle for Kosovo to recognize Israel and for Serbia to move its embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem.

But, it is a setback for Palestinian leaders, who have urged Arab nations to withhold recognition until they have secured an independent state. The Palestinians have seen a steady erosion in once-unified Arab support — one of the few cards they still held as leverage against Israel — since Trump began pursuing an unabashedly pro-Israel agenda.

“This is another stab in the back of the Palestinian cause, the Palestinian people and their rights,” said Wasel Abu Yousef, a senior Palestinian official.

Trump's talk of new weapon puzzles experts

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump is expanding his arsenal of spectacular, but hard to explain, claims about U.S. military might.

First, there were invisible airplanes. Then, a “super duper” missile.

And now, a secret nuclear weapon.

“I have built a nuclear, a weapon, I have built a weapon system that nobody’s ever had in this country before,” Trump said in an interview with journalist Bob Woodward for his book published this week.

“We have stuff that you haven’t even seen or heard about. We have stuff that Putin and Xi have never heard about before,” Trump said, referring to Presidents Vladimir Putin of Russia and Xi Jinping of China. “There’s nobody. What we have is incredible.”

Weapons experts are puzzling over Trump’s words. Some think he may have

been talking about a nuclear warhead that was modified to reduce its explosive power. Known as the W76-2, this weapon certainly is unknown to the general public — not because of secrecy or mystery but because of its obscurity.

Asked by a reporter to clarify his comment, Trump on Thursday said he’d rather not.

“There are systems that nobody knows about, including you, and we have some systems that nobody knows about. And, frankly, I think I’m better off keeping it that way,” he said.

James Acton, a nuclear expert at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, said in an interview Friday that Trump may have been referring to the W76-2 warhead. Although its existence was not a secret, the timing of its first deployment was. The warhead is on the business end of a Trident II D-5 missile carried aboard Navy ballistic missile submarines.

“The timing matches up,” Acton said.

The Woodward interview was Dec. 5, around the time of the first W76-2 deployment, which was not announced publicly until Feb. 4. The weapon itself is not revolutionary. It’s not even the only low-yield warhead in the U.S. arsenal. It is, however, the first major addition to the strategic nuclear force in recent decades and is a departure from the Obama administration’s policy of lessening dependence on nuclear weapons in pursuit of a nuclear-free world. Joe Biden, Trump’s rival for the White House, has said the new weapon is overkill, suggesting he might shelve it if he wins in November.

Acton says Trump may well have been making a garbled reference to some other weapon.

“It’s clear that the president likes boasting about military capabilities and doesn’t always have the tightest grasp on the details,” he said.

Election will affect US forces in Mideast

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump and Democratic rival Joe Biden both say they want to pull U.S. forces out of Iraq and Afghanistan. But their approaches differ, and the outcome of the Nov. 3 election will have long-term consequences not only for U.S. troops, but for the wider region.

During his election campaign four years ago, Trump pledged to bring all troops home from “endless wars,” at times triggering pushback from military commanders, defense leaders and even Republican lawmakers worried about abruptly abandoning partners on the ground. In recent months he has only increased the pressure, working to fulfill that promise and get forces home before Election Day.

More broadly, Trump’s ‘America First’ mantra has buoyed voters weary of war and frustrated with the billions of dollars spent on national defense at the expense of domestic needs. But it has also alienated longtime European partners

whose forces have fought alongside the United States, and has bruised America’s reputation as a loyal ally.

Biden has been more adamant about restoring U.S. relations with allies and NATO, and his stance on these wars is more measured. He says troops must be withdrawn responsibly and that a residual force presence will be needed in Afghanistan to ensure terrorist groups can’t rebuild and attack America again. That approach, however, angers progressives and others who believe the U.S. has spent too much time, money and blood on battlefields far from home.

“We’re getting out of the endless wars,” Trump told White House reporters recently. He said the “top people in the Pentagon” probably don’t love him because “they want to do nothing but fight wars so that all of those wonderful companies that make the bombs and make the planes and make everything else stay happy.”

He continued: “Let’s bring our soldiers back home. Some people don’t like to come home. Some people like to continue to

spend money.”

Biden, the former vice president, has sounded less absolute about troop withdrawal. In response to a candidate questionnaire from the Center for Foreign Relations, he said some troops could stay in Afghanistan to focus on the counterterrorism mission.

“Americans are rightly weary of our longest war; I am, too. But we must end the war responsibly, in a manner that ensures we both guard against threats to our homeland and never have to go back,” he said.

While both talk about troops withdrawals, each has, in some ways, tried and failed.

Trump came into office condemning the wars and declaring he would bring all troops home. When he took over, the number of forces in Afghanistan had been capped at about 8,400 for some time by his predecessor, President Barack Obama. But within a year that total climbed to about 15,000, as Trump approved commanders’ requests for additional troops to reverse setbacks in the training of Afghan forces, fight an increas-

ingly dangerous Islamic State and put enough pressure on the Taliban to force it to the peace table.

Biden was part of the Obama administration’s failed effort to negotiate an agreement with Iraqi leaders in 2011, and as a result, the U.S. pulled all American forces out of that country. That withdrawal was short-lived. Just three years later, as ISIS militants took over large swaths of Iraq, the U.S. again deployed troops into Iraq and neighboring Syria to defeat ISIS.

John Glaser, foreign policy director at the Cato Institute, is skeptical of both candidates. He said Biden, if elected, will struggle with pressure to pull troops out, but will be drawn to getting things back to normal, “which means being there for allies, reupping our commitment to NATO.”

Glaser said he believes Trump really wants to pull troops out but is driven by his electoral self-interest. “He wants to get out but he doesn’t know how to do so in a way that doesn’t feel like tucking tail and running.”

Crews battling fires in California head to devastated regions

Associated Press

BERRY CREEK, Calif. — Smoke from massive wildfires that painted California skies orange was also helping crews corral the deadliest blaze of the year, but despite the progress there was concern that the death toll could mount as crews reach devastated areas.

Nine people, including a 16-year-old boy, have been confirmed dead since lightning-caused fires that started weeks ago fused into a monster that largely destroyed Berry Creek, a tiny hamlet in the Sierra Nevada foothills northeast of San Francisco.

Crews made progress Friday in chopping or bulldozing brush-free lines to control the North Complex fire. In addition, gusting winds that whipped up the flames days earlier eased while smoke blocked out the sun and lowered previously scorching temperatures. Saturday's high temperature was expected to top out at 80 degrees or less.

Nearly 15,000 firefighters were battling 28 major wildfires across California, although 24 were sparked Thursday and quickly contained.

The North Complex remained the deadliest this year, with nine confirmed deaths. Of-

ficials had said 10 bodies were found but Butte County Sheriff Kory Honea on Friday lowered the figure. Honea said remains found in a burned storage shed turned out to be from a resin model of a human skeleton that was used by an anthropology student.

A search continued for 19 people who remained unaccounted for.

More victims could be found when search-and-rescue teams join sheriff's detectives in the rugged mountain area but firefighters said it was too dangerous to immediately begin work in some places.

"Right now, the areas that we need to search are too hot," Honea said.

The sheriff said the victims included Josiah Williams, 16, of Berry Creek, who apparently died while trying to flee the flames in a vehicle.

This year already has seen shattered California records for the most area burned — more land than the state of Connecticut — and recorded the largest fire of all time in the state. Five of the top 10 biggest blazes in state history are still burning and fire season often gets worse in the fall. Some 4,000 homes and other buildings have been destroyed.

Weather helps firefighters in Oregon; dozens missing

Associated Press

SALEM, Ore. — A change in the weather — with winds easing and humidity rising — have helped firefighters battling massive blazes in Oregon that have taken a deadly toll from one end of the state to the other.

Gov. Kate Brown said Friday that dozens of people were still missing and tens of thousands had been forced to flee their homes. The state's emergency management director, Andrew Phelps, said officials are "preparing for a mass fatality event" and thousands of structures have been destroyed.

Oregon officials haven't released an exact death count but at least eight fatalities have been reported. Marion County Sheriff Joe Kast said Friday evening that searchers had found two victims of the Beachie Creek fire near Salem. A 1-year-old boy was killed in wildfires in Washington.

Hundreds of firefighters were battling two large blazes that threatened to merge near the most populated part of Oregon, including the suburbs of Portland.

Brown said more than 40,000 Oregonians have been evacuated and about 500,000 are in different levels of evacuation zones, either having been told to leave or to prepare to do so. She dialed back a statement late Thursday by the state Office of Emergency Management that said a half-million people had been ordered to evacuate statewide.

Scores of people were missing in Jackson County in the southern area of the state and in Marion County east of Salem, the state capital, Brown told a news conference. Authorities also announced that a man had been arrested on two counts of arson in connection with a fire in southern Oregon.

Improved weather helped efforts on the ground after days of high winds, heat and low humidity. "The wind laid down quite a bit for us yesterday," said Stefan Myers of the state's fire information team.

Almost 500 personnel were working on the fires near Portland, which were just a few miles apart, with rugged terrain between them that limits boots-on-the-ground efforts to control the flames, Myers said. If the fires merge, they could generate enough heat to send embers thousands of feet into the air, potentially igniting other areas.

Authorities say more than 1,500 square miles have burned in Oregon during recent days, nearly double the amount in a typical year and an area larger than Rhode Island.

Jackson County Sheriff Nathan Sickler said a 41-year-old man was jailed on two charges of arson for a fire that started Tuesday in the Phoenix area in southern Oregon. The fire burned hundreds of homes and also had an ignition point in Ashland near a spot where a man was found dead. Authorities said the man denied starting the fire.

Judge: Saudi royals must answer 9/11 questions

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Two members of Saudi Arabia's royal family will have to answer questions about the Sept. 11 attacks in what lawyers for victims call a turning point in a long-running lawsuit, a federal judge ruled.

U.S. Magistrate Judge Sarah Netburn in a written ruling unsealed late Thursday ordered Saudi Arabia to make the royals — and other Saudi witnesses, including current and former government official — available for depositions.

It was unclear how and when the witnesses will be deposed,

but the decision means "we can start uncovering what they know," plaintiff's attorney Jim Kreindler said Friday.

The members of the royal family include Prince Bandar bin Sultan, who is a former intelligence chief in Saudi Arabia and was the kingdom's U.S. ambassador from 1983 to 2005,

court papers said.

Some relatives of Sept. 11 victims claim that agents of Saudi Arabia knowingly supported al-Qaida and its leader at the time, Osama bin Laden, before hijackers crashed planes into New York's World Trade Center, the Pentagon and a Pennsylvania field.

Study: Kids infected at day care spread virus at home

Associated Press

NEW YORK — Children who caught the coronavirus at day cares and a day camp spread it to their relatives, according to a new report that underscores that kids can bring the germ home and infect others.

Scientists already know children can spread the virus. But the study published Friday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention “definitively indicates — in a way that previous studies have struggled to do — the potential for transmission to family members,” said William Hanage, a Harvard University infectious diseases researcher.

The findings don’t mean that schools and child-care programs need to close, but it does confirm that the virus can spread within those places and then be brought home by kids. So, masks, disinfection and social distancing are needed. And people who work in such facilities have to be careful and get tested if they think they may be infected, experts said.

In the new study, researchers from Utah and the CDC focused on three outbreaks in Salt Lake City child care facilities between April and July. Two were child-care programs for toddlers, and the other was a camp for older kids. The average age of kids at all three programs was about 7.

At two of the facilities, investigators were able to establish that an infected adult worker unknowingly introduced the virus.

The study concluded 12 children caught the coronavirus at the facilities and spread it to at least 12 of the 46 parents or siblings that they came in contact at home.

Alaska

JUNEAU — Juneau planned to conduct testing events this weekend for people who visited bars involved in a recent outbreak of the coronavirus.

Officials said the testing was scheduled for Friday, Saturday and Sunday at the city’s Centennial Hall, KTOO Public Media in Juneau reported.

Officials on Wednesday said

the outbreak was related to a single large event and is believed to have infected at least nine people.

The outbreak affected several bar workers and city officials recommended recent patrons should be tested, including those without symptoms.

Florida

MIAMI — Florida moved closer to fully reopening from its coronavirus restrictions as Gov. Ron DeSantis announced that the state’s two most-populous counties will loosen some stringent regulations on businesses and set the stage for their schools to resume classroom instruction.

DeSantis said Miami-Dade and Broward counties on Monday will move into Phase 2 of the economic recovery program, the last two in the state to advance to that stage. This will allow those counties’ schools to resume on-campus teaching, although that will not happen immediately. Both county school boards will devise plans and set target dates, and parents will be allowed to keep their children home and take classes online.

By moving to Phase 2, Broward and Miami-Dade can join the rest of the state in allowing more indoor entertainment centers to open at 50% capacity with mandatory masks.

Louisiana

NEW ORLEANS — Bars in a handful of Louisiana parishes will be allowed to re-open under new, looser coronavirus restrictions announced by Gov. John Bel Edwards.

Bars in the state have been closed since July unless they have licenses to operate as restaurants. Under the guidelines announced Friday, bars in parishes where the percentage of positive COVID-19 deaths is 5% or below for four weeks can open if parish leaders give the OK, Edwards said.

Dr. Alex Billioux, an assistant state health secretary, estimated the criteria currently apply in only five of Louisiana’s 64 parishes, which are the equiva-

lent of counties in other states. New Orleans (contiguous with Orleans Parish) fits the criteria but Mayor LoToya Cantrell has made clear bars will remain closed for the time being. None of the state’s other large cities are in parishes that meet the two-week, 5% threshold.

Nebraska

LINCOLN — The owner of a Lincoln bowling alley who has been at loggerheads with city officials for weeks over orders intended to slow the spread of the coronavirus is suing to stop the mandates from being enforced.

Benjamin Madsen, general manager of Madsen’s Bowling & Billiards, filed the lawsuit against the city and its mayor, police chief and health director, the Lincoln Journal Star reported. The lawsuit alleges they have no legal authority to issue civil penalties or shut down businesses that don’t follow the mandates. The bowling alley has also filed a \$10 million claim against the city making the same allegations.

The lawsuit seeks to suspend all enforcement of the city’s mandates, find them unlawful and award damages for lost profits.

New Jersey

TRENTON — Almost three-fifths of people who respond to New Jersey’s COVID-19 contact tracers are refusing to cooperate, Democratic Gov. Phil Murphy said.

Murphy called on people to cooperate with the state’s roughly 1,800 contact tracers, whose ranks he built up with the aim of smothering any new outbreaks.

He suggested people are worried that the tracers might pass information along to law enforcement, particularly for those associated with underage drinking parties. But he sought to allay those concerns.

“It’s not a witch hunt,” he said.

Overall, 82% of people getting initial calls from tracers answer them. He said 59% refuse cooperation, which he

called “bad news.”

New Mexico

GALLUP — A proposal to require mandatory sentences for people caught breaking the coronavirus curfew on the Navajo Nation is awaiting consideration by the Navajo Nation Council, their highest legislative body.

Police have been charging curfew violators with public nuisance, which gives judges the choice of sentencing to 30 days in jail or fines of up to \$1,000, the Gallup Independent reported.

Under the new guidelines, first-time rule-breakers of the 9 p.m. to 5 a.m. curfew will be ordered to pay fines of \$500. Second-time culprits will face \$1,000 fines. Third-time offenders will pay \$1,000 fines and get prison sentences of up to 30 days.

The council’s Law and Order Committee on Tuesday unanimously backed the proposal but the council’s Health, Education and Human Services Committee unanimously opposed it on Sept. 2.

The proposal will be considered by a third committee before it is considered by the full council.

Wyoming

CASPER — The University of Wyoming plans to restart in-person classes Tuesday after switching to online learning when a cluster of coronavirus cases emerged.

President Ed Seidel temporarily halted in-person instruction Sept. 2 after the university confirmed seven cases of the coronavirus within a 24-hour period.

School officials said they haven’t confirmed a new case among students since last Tuesday, the Casper Star-Tribune reported.

Seidel said the campus would reopen next Tuesday “barring a significant increase in cases.” Random sample testing will continue through the end of the year, the school said.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

No one injured when explosion levels house

MO ST. LOUIS — No one was injured when an explosion leveled a house in north St. Louis, officials said.

Firefighters said the explosion destroyed a two-story house and damaged a nearby home. Officials have not said what caused the blast.

The destroyed home's owner, Rochelle Merollis, told KMOV that no one was in the home when the blast occurred. Merollis said her fiancé was at the home about 10 minutes before the explosion occurred and that they were in the process of moving to a new home when the explosion happened.

Governor vetoes bill to raise age to buy weed

FL TALLAHASSEE — Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis vetoed a bill to raise the age to buy tobacco products from 18 to 21 because it would have also banned the sale of flavored liquid nicotine products used in vaping.

The Republican governor said in the veto letter that federal law already raised the age to buy tobacco to 21 but that hundreds of thousands of Floridians vape as a lower risk alternative to smoking.

"This legislation would almost assuredly lead more people to resume smoking cigarettes and it would drive others to the hazardous black market," DeSantis wrote.

Inmates set fire during riot at overcrowded jail

HI HONOLULU — Hawaii County police said they responded to a riot at the jail in Hilo that included inmates setting a fire.

Police said in a statement the cause of the brawl at Hawaii Community Correctional Center had not yet been determined. Police said the fire was extinguished, and state personnel were evacuating inmates to assess damage to the facility.

Police also said there were no reports of major injuries, though there were reported injuries to inmates, and corrections officers suffered smoke inhalation and respiratory issues.

Man threatens daughter of woman he stalked

CA LOS ANGELES — A Southern California man was charged with threatening to rape and kill the daughter of a woman he had been allegedly stalking and harassing for nearly 30 years, federal prosecutors said.

Serge Agopian was charged him with sending threatening communications in an email and letters, the U.S. Attorney's Office said in a news release.

The alleged victim is the daughter of a woman Agopian began harassing in 1991 when they attended the University of California, Santa Barbara, according to a criminal complaint previously filed in this case.

The victim's mother told investigators that Agopian sent her "unsolicited roses, cassette tapes with recorded love songs, poetry, letters, and condoms to her residence" during the 1990s. After she asked him to stop, she believed he sent anonymous packages including roses with dog feces and an item that resembled a bomb, according to court papers.

Theater asks for help to save roof after collapse

MI NEGAUNEE — A Michigan theater that has been around for nearly 100

years is scrambling to raise money to remove debris after the roof collapsed.

The roof at the Vista Theater in Negaunee in the Upper Peninsula failed on Aug. 26 due to intense rain and drain problems.

The Peninsula Arts Appreciation Council, which operates the theater, is trying to initially raise at least \$100,000 on a GoFundMe page. The council said it needs roughly \$32,000 to remove debris as soon as possible. A new roof could cost \$150,000 or more.

The theater is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Earthquake threatens caves at monument

ID BOISE — An earthquake from March is threatening caves at the Craters of the Moon National Monument, officials said.

Two National Forest Service cave experts found two structural concerns in the national preserve after a magnitude 6.5 earthquake near Boise rumbled on March 31.

Wade Vagias, superintendent of the Craters of the Moon, said there is one fracture that has the potential to collapse.

Eric Bilderback, a National Park Service geomorphologist, said the agency must balance intervention with letting nature run its course. He said his office will plan additional evaluations throughout the fall to determine how to proceed, Boise State Public Radio reported.

Teen kills armed man demanding to carpool

KS TOPEKA — A Topeka man who demanded a ride at gunpoint was shot and killed by the man he was threatening, police in Kansas said.

The shooting happened in the parking lot of a west Topeka apartment complex, the Capital-Journal reported. The incident began when Albert Meade Jr., 29, approached and demanded a ride from a man and woman who had just parked their car in the lot, the Kansas Bureau of Investigation said.

When the younger man, who was driving the car, refused, Meade pulled a gun, investigators said. The man, 19, then pulled his own gun and shot Meade, who was taken to a hospital and pronounced dead. The couple involved in the deadly confrontation were taken into custody, questioned and released, police said.

Court records show Meade served prison time for aggravated battery and attempted robbery linked to a 2014 stabbing at a southeast Topeka service station.

Restoration on historic theater moves forward

KY PADUCAH — Work to restore a historic Kentucky theater is moving forward.

Already, the restoration efforts at Paducah's Columbia Theatre have uncovered a pair of stained glass panels from 1927, still in excellent condition, the Paducah Sun reported. One set of doors was restored earlier this year, with funds from a Leadership Paducah class. The other set will be restored when work begins on the theater's facade.

That work is part of Phase I, which Columbia Art House board chair Darlene Mazzone estimates will cost \$1.5 million. The group continues to seek funding in order to preserve the theater for future generations, Mazzone said.

From wire reports

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Newton feeling no pressure with Pats

Associated Press

FOXBOROUGH, Mass. — There are a lot of things Cam Newton is feeling as he prepares to take the field Sunday to succeed Tom Brady as the Patriots' starting quarterback.

Pressure isn't one of them.

"That's not pressure to me," Newton said. "Pressure is when you're looking at your children and you're saying you're 31 and you don't know. You're not ready to retire but nobody is calling your phone. That's pressure. When you don't have control of your destiny."

That was the daily whirlwind the 2015 league MVP remembers being in after being released by the Panthers in March following back-to-back seasons marred by injuries.

"So for me, I'm elated, I'm excited, I'm all that and a bag of chips because I knew that if God didn't show favor over me, man, who knows where I'd be right now?" he said.

What is a big deal for him, though, will be becoming the first Black player in Patriots

history to be the Week 1 starter at quarterback during a time when the country is having a wide-ranging discussion on race.

It was just four years ago that Jacoby Brissett became the first Black quarterback to start for New England in 2016. He started the second game of the season while Brady was serving his four-game suspension for his role in the "Deflategate" scandal. At the time only the Patriots and New York Giants hadn't started a Black player at quarterback.

So it's a milestone that isn't lost on Newton as he prepares to play in his first NFL game since sitting out the final 14 games of the 2019 season with a foot injury.

A lot of eyes will be on him, including from his new teammates who will also be reveling in seeing Newton take the field.

Patriots safety Devin McCourty said it's a moment that not only has meaning for Newton but is something that could

have an even greater impact on a generation of Black kids, including inside his own family.

"As soon as he signed I started thinking about things like that. I think about things like that all the time when I watch football," McCourty said. "Different times where even (brother Jason McCourty's) son — he's 4 now and he looks at different quarterbacks and sees things or I think of other young Black kids and growing up with the mindset of when you were in Pop Warner and things like that, a lot of kids had to be running backs or receivers."

"It was never thought of really to be a quarterback or if he was a quarterback. I feel like you were more told to run. To look up and not only Cam here but look at opening night tonight and (Patrick) Mahomes and DeShaun Watson, it's special."

Newton said he was once one of those Black kids who was inspired watching someone who looked like him play the position.

"Man, listen. And I say this

proudly. When I grew up in Atlanta, Michael Vick was my hero. Still to this day, Michael Vick is my hero. I'm not too proud to say it," Newton said. "Vince Young was my hero. Randall Cunningham was a person that I knew, I didn't get to really see him play growing up, but those types of athletes. Donovan McNabb, African-American quarterbacks, seeing those guys play, it's the main reason I have this opportunity now."

It's why Newton says the journey to get to this point in many ways will make the football part of it easier.

"I just want to remind even myself that I've been here before," he said. "This is my 10th season, so you talk about emotions, I've been playing in a lot of games in my life, a lot of opening days and a lot of first games of the year to a lot of impactful, meaningful games. At this particular point in my career I know how to control myself."

Rays use all-left-handed lineup to hammer Red Sox

Associated Press

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Nate Lowe hit two homers and drove in four runs as Tampa Bay fielded a lineup of all lefties, Blake Snell worked 5¹/₃ scoreless innings and the AL East-leading Rays routed the cellar-dwelling Boston Red Sox 11-1 on Friday night.

Tampa Bay became the first major league team since at least 1900 to use a batting order with only left-handed batters, according to the Elias Sports Bureau.

Snell (4-1) gave up five hits and two walks. He struck out five.

Yoshi Tsutsugo also homered for the Rays, who stopped a three-game skid.

Twins 3, Indians 1: Byron Buxton hit a two-run homer and Kenta Maeda pitched seven

shutout innings for host Minnesota, helping hand Cleveland ace Shane Bieber his first loss of the season.

Yankees 6-10, Orioles 0-1: Luke Voit hit a pair of three-run home runs, Masahiro Tanaka and two relievers combined for a four-hitter and host New York completed a doubleheader sweep of Baltimore.

Phillies 11-3, Marlins 0-5: Jorge Alfaro had his fourth consecutive two-RBI game, and host Miami salvaged a split of a doubleheader against Philadelphia.

Mets 18, Blue Jays 1: At Buffalo, N.Y., Jacob deGrom, wearing an NYPD cap in honor of first responders on the 19th anniversary of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, pitched six strong innings and the visiting Mets routed Toronto.

White Sox 4, Tigers 3: Eloy

Jimenez hit a three-run homer in his team's four-run sixth inning, and host Chicago beat Detroit for the seventh straight time.

Nationals 8, Braves 7 (12): Michael A. Taylor hit a game-ending single in the 12th inning, and Washington beat visiting Atlanta after blowing a five-run lead for the second straight game.

Reds 3, Cardinals 1: Luis Castillo pitched a two-hitter for his first complete game in the majors, Joey Votto homered and Cincinnati beat host St. Louis.

Brewers 1, Cubs 0: Christian Yelich scored on Ryan Braun's ninth-inning sacrifice fly, Brandon Woodruff pitched seven innings of one-hit ball and Milwaukee edged visiting Chicago.

Royals 4, Pirates 3: Kris

Bubic worked hard through five innings to earn his first major league win as host Kansas City defeated Pittsburgh and extended its winning streak to four games.

Athletics 10, Rangers 6: Cleanup hitter Matt Olson connected for a grand slam off Luis Garcia after the Texas opener walked the bases loaded to start the game, and visiting Oakland won the game.

Rockies 8, Angels 4: Charlie Blackmon hit a two-out grand slam that capped a five-run rally in the ninth inning and lifted Colorado over visiting Los Angeles.

Diamondbacks 4, Mariners 3: Caleb Smith threw three solid innings in his first outing with his new team, long reliever Alex Young worked into the ninth and host Arizona beat Seattle.

NBA playoffs roundup

Celtics advance to conference finals

Associated Press

LAKE BUENA VISTA, Fla. — It took every bit of seven games, but Jayson Tatum and the Boston Celtics are headed to the Eastern Conference finals.

And they dethroned the NBA champions to get there.

Tatum scored 29 points, Jaylen Brown had 21 and the Celtics topped the Toronto Raptors 92-87 on Friday night in Game 7 of the East semifinal series.

Marcus Smart scored 16 points and Kemba Walker added 14 for third-seeded Boston. The Celtics will face the fifth-seeded Miami Heat in the East finals, that series starting Tuesday night.

"If you want to achieve something great, if you want to win, it's not going to be easy," Tatum said. "That's what we're here for."

Fred VanVleet scored 20 points for Toronto, which got 16 from Kyle Lowry, 14 from Serge Ibaka, 13 from Pascal Siakam and 11 from Norman Powell. The Raptors were bidding to

become the seventh franchise in NBA history to win four consecutive Game 7's.

Boston scored the first seven points of the fourth, taking an eight-point lead. The Celtics never trailed in the final quarter, though it was close all the way to the end.

"We should definitely be hardened," Celtics coach Brad Stevens said. "We should definitely have a lot more in our toolbox to go back to. But we also have to get ready for a different, more unique team now in Miami."

It was the sixth consecutive Game 7 decided by five points or less, though it wasn't always played like a classic. Toronto had 18 turnovers that Boston turned into 31 points; the Celtics shot 9-for-38 from three-point range and 13-for-23 from the line.

"Man, it was a tough game to lose," an emotional Lowry said. "But they won. Tip your hats to them. They have a chance to go on and play against Miami and get to the championship."

Powell had a chance to tie it on a drive with just under a minute left, his layup erased by Smart with a block that preserved an 89-87 lead. Lowry fouled out on the next possession, a call the Raptors argued and challenged to no avail. Grant Williams missed both free throws, but Powell fouled Tatum going for the rebound.

Tatum made one of two, the lead was three and all Boston needed was one more stop.

The Celtics got just that; VanVleet was well short on a three-point try, Walker sealed it with free throws with 7.9 seconds left, and Toronto's reign was about to end.

Nuggets 111, Clippers 105: Paul Millsap ignited his team with a fracas before scoring 14 of his 17 points in the third quarter, Michael Porter Jr. made a late three-pointer and Denver overcame a 15-point, second-half deficit to stun Los Angeles in Game 5.

Don't evict the Nuggets out of the bubble just yet. They've pulled to 3-2 in their best-of-

seven series.

"Everybody continues to count us out," Nuggets coach Michael Malone said. "That's the way we like it."

This marked Denver's fourth elimination-game win of this postseason, the team's most since capturing six win-or-go-home games during the 1994 playoff run. The Nuggets came back from a 3-1 deficit to capture their first-round series against Utah.

Denver's resiliency comes as no surprise to the Clippers.

"They played like the season was on the line. They had that approach," Clippers standout Paul George said. "They were out there flying around and played hard. They made timely baskets they needed."

Jamal Murray finished with 26 points, and Nikola Jokic added 22 points and 14 rebounds to lift the Nuggets.

Kawhi Leonard scored 36 points and George added 26 for the Clippers, who are searching for the franchise's first appearance in a conference finals.

Sports briefs

COVID-19 knocks out Virginia-Virginia Tech opener

Associated Press

The pandemic disrupted college sports again Saturday, with Virginia and Virginia Tech postponing their Sept. 19 football opener because of COVID-19 issues at Virginia Tech.

The schools said this was a mutual agreement. No make-up date was announced for the game that had been set for Virginia Tech's Lane Stadium. Virginia Tech also will not hold football practice for four days.

The postponement is the second for the Hokies since the Atlantic Coast Conference released a revised schedule. Their original opening game, slated for Sept. 12 against North

Carolina State, was pushed back two weeks after a COVID-19 outbreak at N.C. State.

Virginia is now scheduled to open its season on Oct. 3 at No. 1 Clemson.

In other college football news:

■ West Virginia suspended 11 players for its season opener Saturday for an undisclosed violation of team rules.

Coach Neal Brown announced the suspensions Saturday before the Mountaineers played at home against Eastern Kentucky.

The school didn't specify what the players did, except to say this is not related to the coronavirus.

Andersen wins stage, Roglic still leads Tour

LYON, France — Soren Kragh Andersen broke clear in a fast-changing finish on the roads of Lyon to win Stage 14 of the Tour de France on Saturday.

Primož Roglic, the overall leader, had a drama-free day to finish safely and keep the yellow jersey he claimed last Sunday.

In a stellar Tour for Slovenia, Luka Mezgec took the sprint for second and Simon Consonni was third.

Roglic, the former ski jumper, remained 44 seconds ahead of his fellow Slovenian

Tadej Pogacar, and 59 clear of Egan Bernal, the defending champion.

Korda rides hot putter in desert to early lead

RANCHO MIRAGE, Calif. — The numbers suggested a stress-free time in the desert for Nelly Korda, who had five birdies and a clean card Friday for a 5-under 67 to build a two-shot lead going into the hot weekend at the ANA Inspiration.

Korda was at 11-under 133, two shots clear of Mirim Lee, who also played bogey-free in the rising heat for a 65. Joining them in the final group is Lexi Thompson.

Zverev, Thiem earn spots in men's final

Associated Press

NEW YORK — For two full sets, Alexander Zverev was confused and listless, his body language as poor as his winner-to-error ratio against Pablo Carreno Busta in the U.S. Open semifinals Friday.

Zverev double-faulted and smacked his left high. He put a backhand into the net to cede the opening set and covered his face with both hands. He netted a forehand early in the next set, then turned a forlorn face toward his guest box and put his palms up.

When he pushed a backhand long after 1 hour, 25 minutes of play and shook his head, Zverev trailed by two sets, a deficit the 23-year-old German never had overcome. Never had been to a Grand Slam final, either. Done and done. Zverev constructed quite a comeback, getting his game in gear to beat a fading Carreno Busta 3-6, 2-6, 6-3, 6-4, 6-3 and reach the title match at Flushing Meadows.

Zverev, the No. 5 seed, will play No. 2 seed Dominic Thiem on Sunday, and one will walk

away with his first Grand Slam trophy in a mostly empty Arthur Ashe Stadium; spectators are barred because of the coronavirus pandemic.

"Mentally, I stayed in it. ... A lot of players would have gone away," Zverev said. "There's no easy matches anymore. Sometimes you have to dig deep. Today I dug deep, dug very deep."

Thiem, a 27-year-old from Austria, won a far more entertaining match Friday night, holding off 2019 U.S. Open runner-up Daniil Medvedev 6-2, 7-6 (7), 7-6 (5). Medvedev held a set point in both the second and third, but Thiem hung in there both times and now will try to improve his 0-3 record in Grand Slam finals. He has lost to Rafael Nadal at the French Open the past two years and to Novak Djokovic at the Australian Open this past February.

"I love these big matches — even more when there's a full stadium, but it's also great in front of many, many TV spectators," Thiem said. "To face the best guys in the world, that's what I do the hard work for

all the time at home and in the offseason."

The No. 3-seeded Medvedev hadn't dropped a set all tournament until facing Thiem. He'd been broken just three times, a total Thiem matched by Friday's second set.

In an interlude redolent of his heel turn at Flushing Meadows a year ago, Medvedev got into it with chair umpire Damien Dumusois — yes, the very same official who cited him for yanking a towel from a ballperson in 2019, prompting boos from fans and some egging on from the Russian — and Grand Slam supervisor Wayne McKewen in the first set.

This time, the starting point was a dispute with Dumusois over whether Medvedev challenged a call in time. Medvedev walked around the net to take a closer look at the mark and was called for a code violation, so he started chirping at the chair umpire, saying "Why, because you're not smart?" at one point, and "U.S. Open is a joke, right?" at another.

Then, turning his attention to McKewen, who was at court-

side, and smothering his words with sarcasm, Medvedev said: "Sorry, I think I killed someone, right? Sorry, I was so bad to cross the net. Sorry. My apologies. My sincere apologies to the U.S. Open for crossing the net. Oh, my God."

After the match, Medvedev still thought he was in the right — "I mean, what did I do? Did I hurt someone? Did I do something rude?" — but acknowledged he shouldn't have gotten so angry.

"I lost my concentration," Medvedev said.

Zverev is the first man to win a U.S. Open semifinal after a 2-0 set deficit since Djokovic did it against Roger Federer in 2011 — and, keeping good company, he's also the youngest male finalist at any major tournament since Djokovic was 23 in New York in 2010.

Zverev's first trip to a major semifinal came in January at the Australian Open, where he was eliminated by Thiem, who leads their head-to-head series 7-2.

"A great friendship, a great rivalry," Thiem said.

Nelson, Islanders keep Lightning from going up 3-0

Associated Press

EDMONTON, Alberta — Coach Barry Trotz never questioned his New York Islanders' resolve.

Brock Nelson broke a tie with 3:25 left, Semyon Varlamov made 34 saves and the Islanders kept the Tampa Bay Lightning from taking a three-game lead in the NHL's Eastern Conference final with a 5-3 victory in Game 3.

Blown out in the series opener and facing the prospect of falling down 3-0 after a stunning finish to Game 2 and squandering a two-goal lead Friday night, Nelson scored off a pass from Anthony Beauvillier following a Lightning turnover to put New York up for good.

"This is our fourth series. ... We've had to battle through

double overtime losses, a lot of different things," Trotz said.

"All we talk about is focus on the moment. What can you do now? It doesn't matter what you did in the past. That's old news. See if we can do something in the moment and live the moment for what it is. These guys are staying resilient, finding ways."

Tampa Bay wiped out a two-goal deficit in the first 13 minutes of the final period before Nelson, who also had an assist, beat goaltender Andrei Vasilevskiy, who had won six straight playoff games.

Jean-Gabriel Pageau added an empty-netter in the last minute.

"You really want to be up 3-0 compared to 2-1, but its playoff hockey," Tampa Bay's Tyler

Johnson said. "You have to learn different things throughout."

Game 4 is Sunday.

"We handed that one to them. It was gift-wrapped," Lightning coach Jon Cooper said.

"It's on us. They didn't do anything that I thought we didn't know was coming or put us under pressure," Cooper added. "We made some bad decisions."

Nelson, Beauvillier and Pageau all had two points for the Islanders, who also got goals from Cal Clutterbuck and Adam Pelech while building a 3-1 lead through two periods.

Tampa Bay cut into its deficit with Ondrej Palat's power-play goal at 2:32 of the third period and pulled even a little more than 10 minutes later when Tyler Johnson redirected Erik

Cernak's shot from the right circle past Varlamov.

The Islanders didn't flinch.

Packing it in is not a part of this team," Clutterbuck said.

"I don't think there was too much frustration," Nelson said of wasting the lead. "We stuck with it, stayed the course."

The Lightning played without injured leading scorer Brayden Point and another key player, Alex Killorn, who was serving a one-game suspension for a blindside hit that drove Nelson face-first into the boards in Game 2.

Trotz wasn't surprised that Nelson responded with a strong performance Friday night.

"Brock is under the radar to a lot of people. ... He battled through that last game. It wasn't easy," the Islanders coach said.